



Strengthening Families, Children and Youth
Report and Recommendations
from the
Child Welfare Act Review, 2002



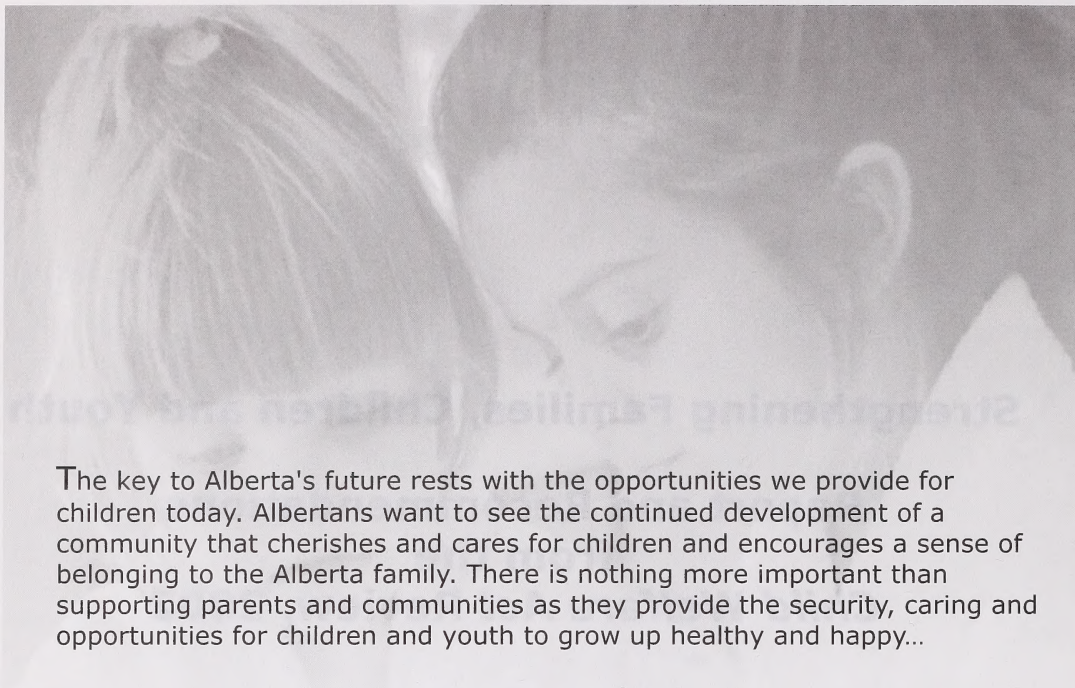


Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2016

<https://archive.org/details/strengtheningfam00albe>

Strengthening Families, Children and Youth

Report and Recommendations from the *Child Welfare Act Review, 2002*



The key to Alberta's future rests with the opportunities we provide for children today. Albertans want to see the continued development of a community that cherishes and cares for children and encourages a sense of belonging to the Alberta family. There is nothing more important than supporting parents and communities as they provide the security, caring and opportunities for children and youth to grow up healthy and happy...

The delivery of programs for children, youth and families will continue to be based on four pillars: (1) prevention and early intervention, (2) integration of services, (3) community-based delivery of services, and (4) improved services to Aboriginal children and families.

Excerpts from Alberta Children's Services Business Plan, 2002-2005

Letter from the Chair

October 2002

Honourable Iris Evans
Minister, Alberta Children's Services:

I am pleased to submit the recommendations of the *Child Welfare Act* Review.

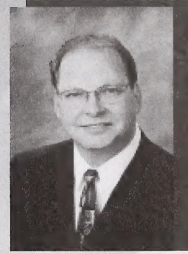
These recommendations have been developed after listening to and reviewing the input of stakeholders from within Alberta, looking at research findings, and talking with experts from across North America. Much thought has been given to the issues and possible directions in which to go.

My goal was to find the best way to build a framework that will protect Alberta's children, as well as support families and communities in their fundamental role of providing security, caring and opportunities for children and youth. Ideally, this legislative framework should provide Alberta with a legal and policy foundation that guides us for years to come strong enough to direct, yet flexible enough to allow us to learn and grow. I hope these recommendations will act as that framework, helping you and your department in developing the new legislation we need.

I would like to thank the hundreds of stakeholders throughout Alberta who made time to provide their valuable thoughts and suggestions. I am pleased that Alberta Children's Services will be referring to their submissions during the process of developing, introducing, debating and ultimately proclaiming Alberta's new legislation.

The best interests and well-being of children was the starting point when developing the recommendations, along with the fundamental responsibility of parents for their children and the interests of the community. As well, throughout the process the values and principles of the people of Alberta were considered and efforts made to integrate those into the intent of the recommendations.

Difficult choices had to be made in coming up with some of the recommendations. In listening to and reviewing the submissions received, it was clear that people's views were strongly held and their values were expressed well. Yet of course not everyone agreed with everyone else. I want those who find that some of the recommendations are not what they had hoped, to know that I did hear their concerns and understand their issues. The differing perspectives were weighed carefully and a balance sought, but not at the risk of moving away from the values and principles expressed in this report.

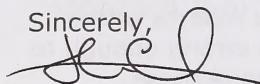


Harvey Cenaiko
MLA Calgary Buffalo

I want to make a point that goes beyond the legislation. Within the Alberta government, various ministries have been working hard to integrate their programs and services and reduce barriers for people. Interdepartmental committees, realigned responsibilities between departments, regionalization and other steps have certainly helped integrate services. However, everywhere I went I still heard people describing their frustrations with 'the system.' I strongly believe that government must go still further in its efforts to make services seamless for people.

I would like to extend my appreciation to all the individuals, professionals and stakeholders who were involved in the review of the legislation. Their support and commitment to improving the lives of children and families in Alberta was heartfelt and appreciated. I would also like to thank you for the opportunity to participate in this critically important endeavor. This work is fundamental to the efforts of communities and the Alberta Government, as everyone works to improve the well-being of Alberta's families, children and youth.

Sincerely,



Harvey Cenaiko, MLA Calgary Buffalo
Chair, *Child Welfare Act Review*

"This legislative framework should provide Alberta with a legal and policy foundation that guides us for years to come strong enough to direct, yet flexible enough to allow us to learn and grow."

Harvey Cenaiko, Chair, Child Welfare Act Review

Table of Contents

Introduction		1
Overview:	A Better Future for Alberta's Families, Children and Youth	3
	Our Vision and Values	5
Section One:	Scope of the Legislation	7
Section Two:	Underlying Principles	8
Section Three:	Collaboration and Prevention	10
Section Four:	Focus on Family and Community Support	11
Section Five:	Protecting Vulnerable Children	12
Section Six:	Security and Stability for Children	14
Section Seven:	Adoption	16
Section Eight:	Aboriginal Children and Families	19
Section Nine:	Listening Carefully to Children and Youth	20
Section 10:	Successful Transitions to Adulthood	22
Section 11:	Increasing Accountability	23
Section 12:	Listening to Families and Community Members	25
Section 13:	Respecting the Privacy of Families	26
Appendices		
One:	Providing Supports to Children with Disabilities and Their Families	27
Two:	Alberta Response Model	28
Three:	Concurrent Planning	30
Four:	Rationale for Reducing the Time Required to Achieve Permanency	32
Five:	Adoption	33
Six:	Methodology	34

Introduction

Albertans care passionately about children and families. You only have to go to a park on a sunny day or an elementary school yard early in the morning to see the time, effort and love spent by parents and caregivers as they help children learn and grow. Albertans show their commitment in countless ways; for example, every year charities and organizations across the province receive thousands of volunteer hours and a generous outpouring of money and goods to help children and families.

This commitment, thought and caring was felt in every presentation and submission received during the review of Alberta's current *Child Welfare Act*. People talked about how the safety and well-being of children and youth had to be paramount. They spoke about their commitment to children in need. They talked about the definition of a family and the importance of the extended family.

They took the time to demonstrate how practice and resources have moved beyond what was envisioned in 1985 when the current legislation came in force, and how Alberta needs new legislation to support further change.

We have learned much over the past 17 years and many things have changed for the better.

Since 1985, it has become clear that the early years from conception to age six are extremely important to a child's development. Research shows that children who are nurtured and given positive attention during the early years are less likely to develop learning, behavioral, emotional and health problems.

We better understand the relationship between the community and the family. All across Alberta, communities have developed services to meet the needs of children and families, often with support through the Family and Community Support Services.

Aboriginal communities have taken important steps to care for their children and strengthen Aboriginal families. This includes the development of services and partnerships that speak well for the future.

The field of child welfare law has evolved, and significant legal and social policy changes continue to emerge as a result of court decisions and better practices.

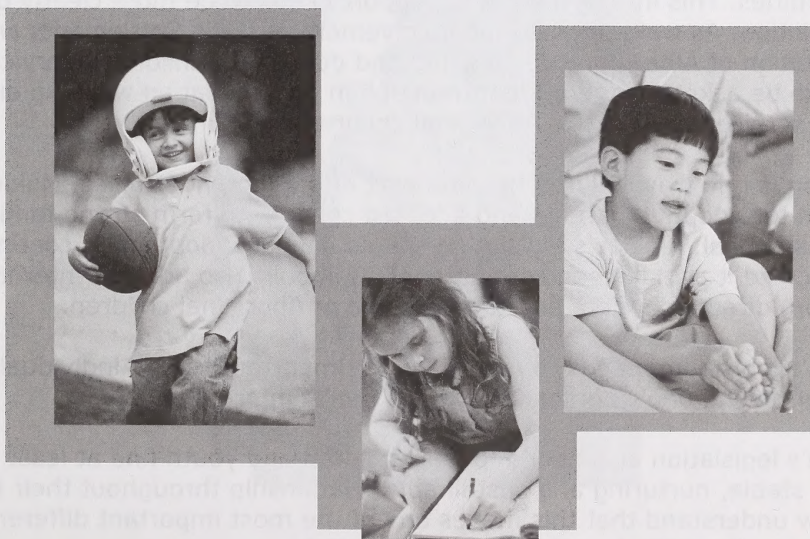
To further support families who come into contact with child welfare, strengthen communities, and improve outcomes for children and families, the "Alberta's Response Model" was developed through Alberta Children's Services. (See Appendix Two for more information on the "Alberta Response Model").

Hearing the concerns and recognizing that changes have taken place, Iris Evans, Minister of Children's Services, asked Harvey Cenaiko, MLA Calgary Buffalo, to conduct a review of Alberta's *Child Welfare Act*. That review took place during the latter part of 2001 and into 2002. It included extensive stakeholder, community and public consultation.

This report is the result of that work and contains a series of recommendations to guide the development of new legislation for Alberta.

"Respond respectfully... to people of all cultures, ethnic backgrounds and faiths... in a manner that recognizes, affirms and values the worth of individuals, families, tribes, and communities, and protects and preserves the dignity of each."

Individual submission



A Better Future for Alberta's Families, Children and Youth

Alberta is at a turning point. We have a Ministry of Children's Services and a system of regional Child and Family Services Authorities. We have a series of agreements with First Nations that will continue to support those communities in caring for their children and strengthening their societies. In all parts of the province, we are successfully moving the delivery of services closer to the community.

Alberta now needs a new legislative framework that reflects the gains we have made in understanding how best to care for children. It should demonstrate the government's commitment to serving children, youth and families, and support a better future for them.

This new legislative framework should include improved permanency planning to ensure better, timelier outcomes for children.

It should enhance our ability to respond to the needs of families in a wider variety of ways and help us work together with the resources that Alberta's communities have created since 1985 when the current *Child Welfare Act* came into effect.

It should include improvements to the way Aboriginal children, youth and families are supported. In our province, six percent of all Albertans are Aboriginal peoples and 46 per cent of them are 20 years of age or younger. First Nations have made addressing these issues a high priority, and are playing an increasing role in the delivery of children's services in their communities. This involvement and support needs to be more clearly defined in legislation. As well, the growing involvement of Métis Settlements and the Métis Nation of Alberta in the planning and delivery of children's services needs to be acknowledged. Clear direction in the legislation will help ensure quality services to Alberta's Aboriginal children and families.

Adoption is one way children become part of permanent families. Making it possible for adoptive parents and adopted children to form strong family bonds is critical. Alberta's legislation should support adoption by continuing to recognize it as a lifelong commitment. It should also address international adoption, direct adoption, and the adoption of Aboriginal children.

Alberta's legislation needs to recognize the importance to an individual's well-being of having one's personal and birth family information.

Alberta's legislation also needs to help children and youth find at least one loving, stable, nurturing and sustainable relationship throughout their lives. We now understand that this makes one of the most important differences to an individual's ability to achieve their potential.

Alberta's legislation needs to make it possible to provide extended supports to youth ages 18 to 22 so they can successfully make the transition to adulthood.

Another important aspect of Alberta's legislative framework is the recognition of the needs of children with disabilities. The fundamental reason that children with disabilities and their families come to government for services is very different than families in need of support and protection services. Not only do they start from a different place, they are also experiencing increasingly complex delivery systems when trying to provide for their children and their requirements. These families do incredible work on behalf of their children and all of us. In order to best assist them in meeting their needs, separate legislation is being recommended. This will help ensure that resources for children with disabilities are delivered consistently across the province.

"Children and youth have the right to grow up without experiencing abuse, exploitation and neglect."

Individual submission



Our Vision and Values

The recommendations contained in this report should help Alberta Children's Services realize its vision of strong children, families and communities in Alberta and help build a better future.

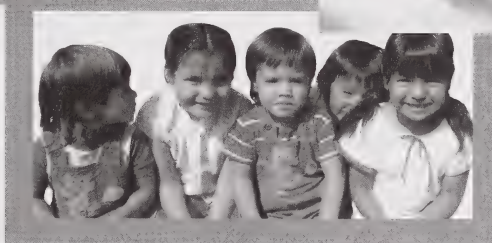
The following values, principles and beliefs have helped shape the recommendations:

- The best interests and well-being of children come first. Every child in Alberta deserves a safe, stable home where they are nurtured by healthy families.
- Loving, stable, nurturing and sustainable relationships are imperative in a child's development. Children need permanence in their young lives as soon as possible as the developmental window for children is narrow.
- The family is the most appropriate place for children to receive the care they need. Families are stronger when they have the support of extended family and community members.
- Parents should be supported in their role as caregivers and nurturers and have access to support services to help them raise their children.
- Parents are responsible for the care and supervision of their children and have both an obligation and a right to raise them according to their values, culture and beliefs. However, when parents are unwilling or unable to ensure a child's safety and development, the government and community have an obligation to intervene and protect.
- Parents deserve some time, support and resources to help them solve their problems and then be able to return and fulfill their parental role. However, if children can't receive the care they need in their family of origin, they must be supported in making that permanent attachment elsewhere.
- A child's cultural identity should be preserved at all times while in the care of child welfare.
- The well-being, self-reliance and preservation of cultural heritage of Aboriginal children, families and communities should be promoted and supported. As well, Aboriginal communities should be supported in the development of their capacity to support their children and families.

Alberta's new legislation should express the intent of these values and principles. At all times, it must reflect the desire of families, communities and the Alberta government to help make children and families stronger.

"We should underscore and support parental responsibility for their children... including financial responsibility, with stronger consequences for abuse and willful neglect."

Individual submission



Recommendations

Section One: Scope of the Legislation

Alberta's new legislative framework needs to reflect the gains in understanding that have been made in the past 17 years since the current Child Welfare Act came into effect. It should build a legislative framework that will protect Alberta's children, as well as support families and communities in their fundamental role of providing security, caring and opportunities for children and youth.

This framework should provide Alberta with a legal and policy foundation that guides us for years to come strong enough to direct, yet flexible enough to allow us to learn and grow.

Further discussion and rationale regarding children with disabilities can be found in Appendix One: Providing Supports to Children with Disabilities and Their Families.

Recommendation 1.1

The new legislation should be called the *Strengthening Families, Children and Youth Act* to better reflect the intent of the legislation and Alberta's priorities.

Recommendation 1.2

While the current *Child Welfare Act* supports three important services to children, youth and families in Alberta: child protection, adoptions and supports for children with disabilities, separate legislation called the *Supports for Children with Disabilities Act* should be developed to cover supports for families with children who have disabilities.

All families should be able to access supports for children with disabilities. The legislation should facilitate this by:

- clarifying eligibility through the definition of disability;
- requiring service plans to have a multi-disciplinary approach that reflects the complex needs of children;
- including an appeal process to ensure parents have access to an independent review;
- enhancing accountability mechanisms to ensure the Supports for Children with Disabilities Program is effective and continuously improving; and
- making it possible to develop supports for youth who are becoming adults.

"Supports and services for children with disabilities and their families should be addressed separately from child protection issues."

Submission by organization

Section Two: Underlying Principles

Currently, the Child Welfare Act reflects values and principles that help courts and workers make decisions about children, youth and families. These need to be strengthened and clarified to ensure that they reflect what we have learned since 1985 when the current legislation came into effect and how society has changed.

These changes include strengthened community resources and the increased ability of First Nation, Métis and Inuit communities to provide support for their children and families. The values and principles are based on the input of Albertans throughout the province.

Recommendation 2.1

The paramount purpose of the new legislation should be to promote the best interests, protection and well-being of children. This must be a primary consideration in decisions that impact children and families.

Recommendation 2.2

The legislation should acknowledge that parents are responsible and accountable for providing their children with adequate care and supervision and ensuring their safety, protection, and well-being. Parents are also responsible for seeking support services when they are needed. However, the new legislation should be clear that the best interests and safety of the child must take precedence over parental and community rights when children are in need of protection.

Recommendation 2.3

The legislation should be clear that decisions regarding a child and family must take into consideration the child's familial, cultural, spiritual, religious and social heritage. A child should be a valued member of a family and a community and should maintain ties with extended family and community members wherever possible.

Specifically provide that in making decisions relating to an Aboriginal child, the uniqueness of the Aboriginal culture, heritage, spirituality and traditions must be respected, and consideration given to the importance of preserving the child's cultural identity.

Recommendation 2.4

The rights of children, youth and families should be clearly identified in the legislation to increase accountability and ensure children's needs are being met. As well, children should be clearly informed of their rights. This obligation should be specifically referred to in the legislation, and children informed in ways they are developmentally able to understand.

Recommendation 2.5

It is important that services to children and families be provided in a manner that is supportive, *least disruptive* to the child and prevents the need for further interventions under the Act.

Recommendation 2.6

Every child deserves a safe, stable home, nurtured and supported by healthy families. Therefore, the principle of permanency planning as a key component in all decision-making for children should be built into the legislation. Permanency planning should also include decisive and earlier decision-making in child protection cases and reflect the importance of collaboration between families, communities and government.

Recommendation 2.7

The requirement under the current *Child Welfare Act* that Albertans report any instances where there are probable grounds to believe a child may be in need of protection should be reinforced and strengthened in the new legislation. There are many reasons why a child may be in need of protection, including physical or emotional neglect and physical, emotional or sexual abuse. A child may also be in need of protection if they do not have a guardian.



Section Three: Collaboration and Prevention

Children and families with complex needs, including mental health issues, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, Attention Deficit Disorder and criminal behavior are prevalent in the child protection system. Unless dealt with, stress on the family escalates and the level of risk to the child increases, often leading to the involvement of protection services.

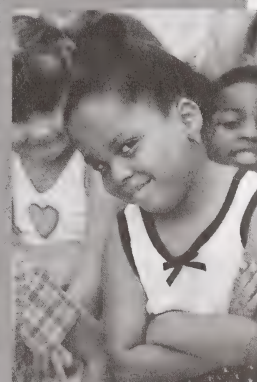
Children, youth and families dealing with complex treatment-focused issues require multiple services delivered through the mandates of several government ministries, agencies, institutions and service providers. If we are going to achieve better outcomes for families, children and youth, collaboration is critical and ministries must be held accountable for working together.

Recommendation 3.1

The legislation should ensure that inter-ministry collaboration and co-ordination with the community is integral to the way services for children and families are provided. Ways of measuring and reporting on inter-ministerial and community collaboration should be developed and the results reported.

Recommendation 3.2

The new *Strengthening Families, Children and Youth Act* should recognize the importance of early intervention and prevention services in helping vulnerable children and families. Early intervention and prevention services should target 'at risk' children and families. This will assist the community in its role of addressing issues such as family violence, truancy, substance abuse, teen pregnancy, children and youth at risk of emotional injury, neglect, and parent-teen conflict.



Section Four: Focus on Family and Community Support

While about 70 per cent of reported cases of abuse or neglect are closed at or before investigation, many of those families would benefit from supportive services to ensure their children's needs are being met. If support is not provided or available, the problems experienced by families may increase, along with the risk to their children. Children's Services has been developing the "Alberta Response Model" to better address the need for support. For further information, see Appendix Two: Alberta Response Model.

Recommendation 4.1

The legislation should make it clear that families can and should contact child protection for support and assistance before problems escalate and become more complex. The system's ability to respond in a flexible way to the varied needs of children, youth and families should be strengthened, including the use of community programs and coordinated services between ministries. It should be possible to refer and coordinate access to community services for lower risk families without formalized protection services. Higher risk families would continue to receive services through the mandated protection services.

Recommendation 4.2

The new legislation should allow for a differential response to families who are assessed as needing protection services, including:

- A strengths-focused assessment process that reflects the child's best interests, safety and well-being, and determines the risk level of a family.
- An investigation that focuses on the situation that led to the abuse or neglect report. This may cover some of the same areas of the assessment, but from a different perspective.

Assessments should reflect the societal and health backgrounds of the family, drawing on the expertise of public health nurses where appropriate.

Recommendation 4.3

The director should be accountable for ensuring a family's protection needs are met, whether receiving those services through differential response from community-based resources or formalized protection services.

"Legislation should enable extended family to care for children who would otherwise be in the care of the director."

Individual submission

Section Five: Protecting Vulnerable Children

The current Child Welfare Act helps child protection workers decide when children need to be protected from abuse and neglect. It is critical that the new legislation be as clear as possible to ensure that consistent, quality decisions are made for children and youth across the province. This is central to the purpose of the legislation. Current practice inconsistencies hurt the system's overall ability to respond quickly and fairly to the needs of children and families.

Recommendation 5.1

Neglect should be clarified and reinforced as grounds for finding a child in need of protection. To ensure consistency in protecting children and supporting families, the definition of neglect should include:

- an inability or unwillingness to provide adequate care and supervision,
- the failure to provide the necessities of life, and
- the failure to provide medical needs that are necessary for the child's health or well-being.

Recommendation 5.2

Emotional injury should be redefined to increase the focus on parental conduct, including accountability and responsibility for their behavior and the impact this has on the emotional health of their children. The new legislation should protect children who are being injured emotionally due to parental behavior, for example as a result of exposure to domestic violence, emotional abuse, parental alcohol and drug abuse. The legislation should make it possible to intervene and provide services to affected children.

Recommendation 5.3

Children's Services should work together with policing agencies and protective services to ensure that families are getting the support they need. This is imperative in situations of domestic violence, where the perpetrator of the abusive situation must be held accountable and support has to be given to the family.

Recommendation 5.4

Section 1(2)(i) of the current *Child Welfare Act*, which states: "*The condition or behavior of the child prevents the guardian of the child from providing the child with adequate care appropriate to meet the child's needs*" should not be included in the new legislation as grounds for finding a child in need of protection. This section has led to practice inconsistencies across the province due to the vague and subjective language.

The remaining grounds for involvement will continue to ensure that children and youth are adequately protected, particularly as the recommended changes around neglect and emotional injury are implemented and the ability to protect children and support families is strengthened.

Recommendation 5.5

The legislation should address the needs of children and youth who are at a high risk of harming themselves or others. Some of these children and youth are placed in a secure facility to stabilize their behavior and ensure their safety. However, a large percentage of them have complex needs and are experiencing mental health or addiction issues. Mental health services are imperative if these children are to be helped. Children's Services needs to partner with mental health providers and the health system to ensure their treatment needs get addressed and an intervention and assistance plan is developed.

Secure Treatment should be renamed 'Secure Services' to reflect the importance of a continuum of services being provided, including confinement for a relatively short period of time in order to be stabilized. They should then be moved to a more appropriate placement, and have access to the necessary supports, including mental health treatment if necessary. If a child is primarily suffering from a mental disorder, the child would be better referred for treatment within the mental health system from the beginning.



Section Six: Security and Stability for Children

Children need secure stable relationships and homes. This is fundamental to their development and ability to achieve their potential. The new legislation should make it possible for this to occur as soon as possible through expedited planning. For further discussion on the concepts introduced in this section, see Appendix Three: Concurrent Planning and Appendix Four: Rationale for Reducing the Time Required To Achieve Permanency.

Recommendation 6.1

The new legislation should support the development of a *concurrent planning* process that obtains permanency at the earliest opportunity for children in the care of the director. Concurrent planning is the practice of developing two plans at the same time. The first is the preferred plan and focuses on reunification with the child's family. The second plan is an alternative or contingency permanency plan.

Children need permanent homes as quickly as possible for their emotional well-being. Concurrent planning will reduce the time to achieve a permanent placement for children and youth in their familial home, with extended family, in their community or through adoption.

Current practices are not promoting permanency for children. Presently, child welfare works with parents to resolve the issues that placed their child in need of protective services. If those efforts are unsuccessful, the child welfare worker will then develop and introduce an alternative permanency plan. When this method of sequential planning is used, children can stay in care for the greater part of their childhood. In addition, children may experience multiple moves in care. This impacts their ability to form normal attachments and healthy emotional and physical development.

Recommendation 6.2

It should be clear in the new Act that parents need to and should have meaningful participation in developing a child-centered plan of care, including involvement in the concurrent planning process. As well, all parties affected by decisions involving permanency for the child must have a clear understanding of their responsibilities and should be held accountable for achieving them. This should be facilitated through family group conferencing, alternate dispute resolution processes and mediation.

Recommendation 6.3

Parental accountability and responsibility for following through with the terms of a service plan should be strengthened to ensure that their children's needs are being met. There should be an increased focus on ensuring that parents understand their responsibilities and what they need to do in order to address the issues that placed their child in need of protection services. They also need to understand that not following through would mean a continued risk to the safety of their child and increased involvement of protection services.

Recommendation 6.4

When determining a reasonable length of time for children to be in care, the new legislation should recognize the developmental needs of children and how those needs change over time. This can be accomplished by using the child's age to determine the maximum time that a child can be in care before permanent options are sought. Research has proven that children under six are quickly at risk developmentally if they are unable to form loving, stable and sustainable relationships.

The system will need to be more responsive and parents more accountable for the well-being of their children to ensure that protection concerns are addressed within developmentally appropriate time frames.

Recommendation 6.5

The new legislation should allow for the use of mediation or alternative dispute resolution processes when developing plans that are reflective of the needs of children and families. This should further support the meaningful involvement of parents and help resolve issues, resulting in better outcomes for children and families.

Recommendation 6.6

Private guardianship should be re-emphasized as a permanency option for children and youth who cannot safely remain with their parents. This could help children unable to return home or be adopted, to be cared for in extended family networks or long term care. Private guardianship would provide legal sanction for these relationships, making those relationships as autonomous as possible and protecting children from placement disruption.

Transitional services and support should be provided during a three-month assessment period when the child is in the continuous care of the potential guardian.

Recommendation 6.7

The legislation should allow support to be provided to people who adopt or provide private guardianship for children with complex needs who are in the permanent care of Children's Services. Providing these 'supports for permanency' will assist these families in the commitment they have made to give a child or children permanency and stability.

Section Seven: Adoption

Adoption is intended to provide a lifelong commitment of permanence and stability for children. It can provide a sense of place and belonging to children and youth who may otherwise not be able to have this experience. Legislation in the area of adoption addresses the adoption of children in government care, international adoption, private adoption, and adoption records. For further information and a general discussion, see Appendix Five: Adoption.

Recommendation 7.1

The new legislation should reaffirm that adoption is intended to provide a lifelong commitment of permanence and stability for children and a loving, stable, nurturing and sustainable relationship.

Recommendation 7.2

Paramount consideration should be given to the best interests of a child in any adoption. This should be reflected in the legislation and could include:

- the child's views and wishes if they can be expressed;
- the benefits to the child of stability, cultural and family ties;
- the effects of delays in decision-making;
- the mental, emotional and physical needs of the child and stage of development; and
- the importance of a positive relationship with a parent and family.

In the case of an Aboriginal child, the uniqueness of culture, heritage, spirituality and traditions must be respected.

Recommendation 7.3

Legislation governing all international adoptions in Alberta should be consistent with federal immigration law and regulations, and should clarify the private international adoption process for Alberta residents. Currently, in adopting a child from another country, some countries grant only 'simple' adoptions, which do not give full parental responsibility to the adoptive parent. Pursuant to federal immigration regulations, adoptive parents who have a 'simple' adoption order from a foreign country would not be allowed to bring the adopted child into Canada.

Recommendation 7.4

The new Act should provide a legislative base for international adoptions in Alberta. This will provide adoptive parents with clear, regulated requirements to help ensure their international adoption proceeds smoothly.

The present legislation needs updating to address the director's role in processing private or government international adoptions. This would include, for example, the adoption of a child who was in the care of a child welfare authority of another country not covered by the Hague Inter-country Convention on Adoption.

Recommendation 7.5

All private-direct adoptions should be allowed to proceed through the relative/step-parent placement process without involving a licensed agency or requiring a home assessment, unless requested by the birth parent or the courts.

The current legislation requires that a licensed agency process private-direct adoptions, including the provision of a home assessment to the court. This process is costly and intrusive and may delay permanency planning.

Safeguards would be built into private-direct, relative and step-parent adoptions by requiring people seeking to adopt to file information on any previous involvement in child protection or criminal activity with the application to adopt. The courts could request a home study if it was felt that one was warranted by the circumstances.

Recommendation 7.6

In adoptions where all the parties with a legitimate standing in the process agree with the adoption proceeding, the need for a formal court process should be waived and a 'desktop' approval process be made available for use.

Adoption applications could then be considered by a judge in chambers without the necessity of an in-person hearing. This would streamline the process, as well as support Aboriginal communities in further developing culturally sensitive and appropriate processes that support permanency for their children.

Recommendation 7.7

The director, and children who were in the permanent care of the director, should be given the legal ability to access the child's adoption file.

Currently, once an adoption order is granted, the Minister is required to seal all documents that relate to the adoption. The inability to access a child's sealed adoption information hinders the director's ability to fulfill the role of guardian if the adoption breaks down or there are protection concerns. This interferes with the ability to provide assistance and engage in effective permanency planning for these children. In addition, older children who have knowledge and memories of their birth family and background are not able to access their file information.

Recommendation 7.8

Adult adoptees or birth parents should have a right of access to confidential adoption information, and adoption records should be made increasingly open and available under the new legislation:

- For adoptions granted *after* the new legislation is proclaimed, adoptees and birth parents should have access to their confidential adoption information.

Individuals involved in the adoption would be able to file a 'no contact preference'. This would support the release of all identifying information, including sibling information, to the adoptee or the birth parent.

- For adoptions granted *before* the new legislation is proclaimed, an adoptee or birth parent should be given access to confidential adoption information unless a veto has been filed by the birth parent or adoptee. The veto ensures the adoption file remains closed. This is an extension of the current provision where that right of access was granted for adoptions that took place on or after January 1, 2000.

In instances where a parent who registered a veto is deceased, identifying information about that parent would be disclosed. In situations where both parents are deceased, full disclosure of information would occur to all the parties involved. This would include the release of sibling information.

- The information would be available once an adoptee is 18 years of age.

Understanding one's past is a critical and integral part of a person's emotional and physical well-being. However, balance is required between the differing interests and a thorough, sensitive communications process will be necessary to inform individuals of their right to veto or file a no contact preference.

"Open adoptions should be encouraged in order to allow children access to their identity, birth parents, cultural heritage and medical records."

Individual submission

Section Eight: Aboriginal Children and Families

There are many First Nations and Métis children receiving services under the Child Welfare Act, and a small number of Inuit children. As well, a large percentage of children in permanent care of the director of child welfare are Aboriginal.

Over the past decade, Children's Services has worked with both First Nations and Métis communities, so they can become partners in planning and delivering services to their children. However, the extent and success of this involvement varies across the province. First Nations and Métis communities have indicated that they would like an increased role in the permanency planning processes involving their children.

Recommendation 8.1

The legislation should define the Aboriginal child to include Indian, Métis and Inuit. Until the federal *Indian Act* is amended, the term Indian must be used in reference to First Nations' children. However, when the federal legislation changes, the provincial Act will change as well.

Recommendation 8.2

Alberta's new legislation should acknowledge the uniqueness of the Aboriginal culture, heritage, spirituality and traditions. It should also increase the responsibility of the child welfare system to respond appropriately to the needs of Aboriginal families and children.

Aboriginal communities should have meaningful involvement to further support their increased capacity to care for Aboriginal children. In making decisions about an Aboriginal child, the uniqueness of Aboriginal culture, heritage, spirituality and traditions must be respected, and consideration given to the importance of preserving the child's cultural identity. This includes increased involvement in the adoption process.

Recommendation 8.3

The legislation should clearly define and emphasize the importance of Aboriginal involvement in planning and decisions affecting Aboriginal children. Meaningful involvement should occur at the earliest stages of children welfare intervention.

Recommendation 8.4

The legislation should allow the governing body of a First Nation community to recommend that an individual be designated as the band's primary contact person. This will facilitate the community's involvement in planning for Aboriginal children and families.

"Notification and consultation with First Nation or Métis communities should be initiated upon initial involvement, and continue as long as the child requires services."

Agency submission

Section Nine: Listening Carefully to Children and Youth

Sometimes children and youth are not consulted about decisions that will affect their lives. Sometimes they are consulted but believe they were not heard or that what they said was not considered in the decision-making process. Sometimes they do not agree with the decisions made. Sometimes decisions are made that have more to do with resolving adult issues or with serving bureaucratic needs than they do with meeting the needs or serving the interests of children and youth.

The Children's Advocate represents the rights, interests and viewpoints of young people receiving child protection services, and supports children and youth as they express their wishes and opinions to Children's Services. The Children's Advocate also makes recommendations to Children's Services about changes they feel should be made to improve services to children and families.

Although the Children's Advocate provides an important role in providing support to children and youth, they do not maintain a relationship throughout the child's life. This can contribute to the number of transitional professionals who are involved with children and youth receiving services through Children's Services.

Recommendation 9.1

Change the name of the Children's Advocate to the Child and Youth Advocate to acknowledge the Advocate's increasing role, and build on and broaden the role of the advocacy to include providing children and youth with stable, nurturing relationships with healthy and stable adults.

The role of the Child and Youth Advocate should include the following:

- Upon receiving a request from, or on behalf of a child or youth, the Child and Youth Advocate would ensure the child or youth has access to the support of an advocate.
- The preferred means would be for the Child and Youth Advocate to identify, support and train a 'natural' advocate for the child or youth. This natural advocate is defined as a person with significant interest in the child or youth who is willing and able to advocate for or mentor the child or youth.
- Responsibility to ensure advocacy services are provided until a natural advocate can be identified. In the absence of this advocate, the Child and Youth Advocate would work with the child or youth, and others involved with the child or youth, to resolve outstanding issues through engaging in alternative dispute resolution processes and collaboration. This would include ensuring the views of the child or youth are raised for due consideration to achieve the best interests of the child.
- In addressing the concerns of children and youth and taking corrective

action in a timely and responsive manner, individual and systemic issues would be reported to the Minister and addressed through the recommended quality assurance function.

Recommendation 9.2

The role of the Child and Youth Advocate should be strengthened both by ensuring that recommendations made by the Advocate are responded to in a corrective manner and through an increased quality assurance role or function. The Advocate should also report quarterly to the Minister and Legislative Assembly, rather than annually to provide more timely feedback to the system.

Recommendation 9.3

The Child and Youth Advocate should work with First Nations agencies and communities to increase the availability and accessibility of advocacy support to First Nations' children and youth. This should be done in ways that reflect the culture and values of the First Nations and the federal government's responsibility for providing services on reserves.



Section Ten: Successful Transitions to Adulthood

Families throughout Alberta understand that their children need help and guidance during the critical few years after reaching 18 and while they are young adults in their early twenties. This is just as true for youth in care. The evidence shows that youth leaving child welfare are at extreme risk for an unfortunate profile of harmful behaviors, substance abuse, minimal education, unemployment, and involvement in crime, prostitution and suicide.

While some services can be provided through an agreement made with youth, they deserve a well thought-out and supportive plan to help them successfully make the transition to adulthood.

Recommendation 10.1

The new legislation should bring together the current provisions for youth services in a separate 'youth in transition' section. This will increase the focus on helping youth in care of the director successfully move into adulthood.

Recommendation 10.2

For youth in the care of the director, the legislation should allow care and maintenance up to age 21, with the ability to extend it to age 22. The current limit is age 18 with an extension to age 20.

Recommendation 10.3

Older youth in care should be assisted in becoming adults through the development of a *plan for independence*. It should include the youth's history, including development, personality and birth information, accomplishments, school and health records, and detailed information on parents and their communities. It should also include plans for additional supports such as life skills training, employment skills or career counseling. This will require inter-departmental co-ordination and ministerial collaboration.

"When youth turn 18 they are not necessarily ready to leave home due to delays or disabilities...Team members should assist in planning with the youth a year prior to their discharge date."

Individual submission

Section Eleven: Increasing Accountability

The Minister monitors and directs quality assurance, establishes strategic direction, policies and standards, and assesses services delivered through the Ministry. Quality assurance processes need to be strongly supported in the legislation, particularly with respect to the delivery of child welfare services.

Mechanisms for accountability and increasing effectiveness in service delivery are needed at all levels in the system, including persons working in the system, the community, Child and Family Services Authorities, First Nations and the government. Currently the Minister's only legal way to address concerns is to revoke delegation, making it difficult to direct remedial action in situations that require it.

As well, foster homes, groups homes and secure treatment facilities are currently licensed under the Social Care Facilities Licensing Act. The legislation requires licensing only where there are four or more children being cared for, and there are no regulated standards in place to assess quality of care.

Recommendation 11.1

The Minister's statutory authority and responsibility for delivering services through Child and Family Services Authorities and First Nations delegated agencies should be clearly set out in the legislation, including the means to address concerns about the quality of services provided and contract compliance.

The Minister currently can appoint a director of quality assurance. The Minister should be given a stronger mandate that includes the ability to:

- monitor and assess directors of child welfare in carrying out their duties and responsibilities;
- require directors of child welfare to implement measures specified by the Minister for the purpose of improving quality of service; and
- require the Child and Family Services Authority or First Nation agency to which the director reports, to take remedial action as directed by the Minister when there is evidence of non-compliance with the Act, policies and standards.

Recommendation 11.2

Where a child has been under the permanent guardianship of a director for a period of one year, the new legislation should require that the director submit a written report to the Minister describing the circumstances, the director's permanency plan for the child, and the progress made. After the initial report, further reports should be submitted quarterly while the child remains under the permanent guardianship of the director. The Director of Quality Assurance will review the reports and ensure that permanency plans are being implemented.

Recommendation 11.3

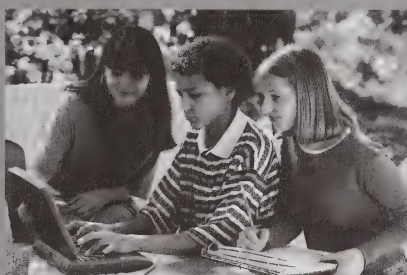
As delegated directors have significant responsibility and must make critical decisions on behalf of children, the legislation should specify that the director of child welfare designated by a Child and Family Services Authority or First Nation agency have a minimum of 10 years of experience in child protection practice and a Bachelor of Social Work.

Recommendation 11.4

Responsibility for licensing child welfare facilities should be placed within the new legislation and standards developed to ensure continuous improvement, compliance to regulated standards and province-wide consistency in quality of care. This will require removal of child welfare facilities from the licensing requirements of the *Social Care Facilities Licensing Act*. It should also state that a director of child welfare may only place a child in facilities that have met regulated standards and are licensed by the director.

Recommendation 11.5

When administration of the Child Financial Support Program was transferred to Children's Services from Human Resources and Employment, regulatory authority remained under the *Social Care Development Act*. Legislative authority for the program should be included in the new legislation.



Section Twelve: Listening to Families and Community Members

When a child, youth, family, foster parents or adoptive parents disagree with a decision made by Children's Services, they have the right to have that decision reviewed. The two formalized options include an administrative review that is governed through policy, and an appeal panel that is governed by legislation.

An administrative review is an internal process that utilizes the skills and experience of two Children's Services managers that have not been involved in the situation. Families, children and youth can also access the citizens appeal panel. The Child Welfare Act states who can appeal, the types of decisions that can be appealed and establishes timelines and procedures. The issues involved in this process relate to who should be eligible to appeal, the decisions that can be appealed, and the authority the appeal panel should have.

Recommendation 12.1

The legislation should strengthen and clarify the provisions for an administrative review. It should also clarify who can request an administrative review or make an appeal to a citizen panel. It should be clear which decisions can be appealed and the authority of the panel.

Recommendation 12.2

The legislation should direct appeal panels to make decisions in the child or youth's best interests and take into consideration the importance of permanency planning for the child.

Recommendation 12.3

Presently, a child, guardian of a child, or a foster parent who has had continuous care of a child for at least six months may appeal certain decisions of a director to the panel. This should be expanded to include any adult who has a significant relationship with a child and has provided care to the child for six months. If the child is 12 years of age or older, the child's consent should be required.

Recommendation 12.4

The appeal process should be culturally sensitive, particularly to Aboriginal children and families, and reflect the needs of the Aboriginal community.

Section Thirteen: Respecting the Privacy of Families

Families have a right to privacy, yet information needs to be shared in order to provide the best services to children and families. When a family receives services, they need to know when, with whom and how their information will be shared. As well, individuals, agencies and organizations who receive personal information need clear rules to ensure that they are able to store, use and disclose information appropriately.

The current legislation does not prohibit any person from publishing the identity of a child receiving services under the Act. This is very intrusive in a child's life and does not allow for any level of confidentiality.

Recommendation 13.1

Ensure the new legislation strikes a balance between the need to share information and the need to respect the privacy of children and families. This would include the ability to share information and facilitate community involvement in meeting the protection needs of families. It would also include family group conferencing and other multi-disciplinary approaches that will be enabled in the legislation.

Recommendation 13.2

The legislation should make it illegal to publish the identity of a child receiving services under the Act.



Appendix One

Providing Supports to Children with Disabilities and Their Families

Families with children who have disabilities face a tougher set of challenges than most other families. Supports to these families is currently provided under the *Child Welfare Act* through a section called the 'Handicapped Child'. Separate legislation is being recommended to better meet the needs of children with disabilities and their families.

Under the current *Act*, Children's Services can enter into an agreement with a family whose child is "handicapped" and provide services or financial assistance to the family and child through the Resources for Children with Disabilities (RCD) program. The decision of Children's Services can be referred to an Appeal Panel or the Court of Queen's Bench.

These services for children with disabilities are provided through a number of government ministries and community agencies. Currently, families face increasingly complex service delivery systems and have expressed confusion and frustration with jurisdictional barriers, lack of program mandate clarity, and service gaps. They have also expressed the need for an easily identifiable integrated response system across ministries, service providers and communities.

The consultation and submission process identified a need to separate services for families with children who have disabilities from child protection legislation. As well, the profile of this program would be significantly enhanced through stand-alone legislation.

Separate legislation called the *Supports for Children with Disabilities Act* should be developed to cover support for families with children who have disabilities. All families should be able to access Supports for Children with Disabilities Program. The new legislation should facilitate this by:

- clarifying eligibility by defining disability;
- requiring service plans to have a multi-disciplinary approach that reflects the complex needs of children;
- including an appeal process to ensure parents have access to an independent review;
- enhancing accountability mechanisms to ensure the Supports for Children with Disabilities Program is effective and continuously improving; and
- making it possible to develop supports for youth with disabilities who are becoming adults.

Appendix Two

Alberta Response Model

The “Alberta Response Model” is the implementation of several complex activities that address short-term and long-term needs of children, youth and families who come into contact with the child welfare system. Simply put, it is “family-centered practice with child-centered outcomes”.

Vision, Beliefs, Principles

The following statements are based on the Government of Alberta and Ministry of Children's Services business plans and the Alberta Mental Health Board's Children's Mental Health Policy Framework approved by the partnering Deputy Ministers' Alberta Children and Youth Initiative.

Vision

Alberta Response Model is congruent with the Government of Alberta's commitment that “Our children will be well cared for, safe, successful at learning and healthy”.

Beliefs

- Children, youth and families have strengths and potential.
- Communities have the commitment and capacity to support children, youth and families.
- Individuals, families, community and governments share responsibility and accountability for achieving better outcomes for children and youth who come into contact with child welfare systems.

Principles

- **Family-Centered:** There is a need for programs and services to be designed for children, youth and parents/caregivers in ways that optimize well-being.
- **Respect:** Respect for the potential, dignity, culture, spirituality and diversity of all children, youth and their families shall be demonstrated.
- **Well-Being:** The well-being of children and youth will be positively affected in environments where they are safe, well nourished, stimulated, loved and have opportunities to learn and play.
- **Community-Based:** There is a need for programs and services to be available, accessible and reflect community needs and community engagement.
- **Collaborative:** Better outcomes for children and youth will be achieved through efficient and effective collaborative action based on common goals.
- **Information:** Appropriate and timely information on service need, capacities and resources must be available and disseminated to all who need it for planning and action.

Alberta Response Model Activities

Adapting Current Case Management to a *Differential Response System*

A differential response system involves the provision of early assessment and support services to lower risk children and parents who are motivated to address the issues that threaten the safety of their child.

When a community agency provides services through the differential response system, the agency is required to report information about the family to the director. This ensures that safety needs are addressed and the director remains accountable for the support provided.

For those cases where the risk to children is higher or where the family will not address their needs voluntarily, there would be a child protection services investigation to determine whether or not the child needs mandatory protective services.

Partner Delivery Systems

In order for a differential response system to be effective, community-based services and child welfare must work as partners. The community (which includes human services such as social services, health, education, and justice) provides more accessible and natural supports for children and their families. Families receive more appropriate services in a timely manner through strong community-based networks. In many communities across the province, these partnerships exist and would be enhanced in this new environment.

Increasing Permanency Planning

Children need stable nurturing relationships in permanent homes. Several policy changes are under consideration to make this happen more readily for children in care. They include enabling front-line staff to involve extended family earlier in planning for a child in need of alternative care, establishing more specific standards of permanency planning and developing a private adoption agency role in the adoption of children who are permanent wards of the government.

Increased Parental Responsibility

Children's Services honours parent-child relationships by providing services that help parents better assume their responsibilities.

Although few in number, there are parents whose children receive services and who are able to provide a financial contribution towards those services. There will be an increased expectation that parents who can contribute to services will do so according to their ability.

Evaluation of Child-Centered Outcomes

Alberta Response Model will transform the child welfare system and community-based service systems so that desired outcomes will be achieved. Measuring progress towards those outcomes will track this transformation and suggest ways to improve the type and delivery of services, leading to a continuous cycle of improvement based on evaluation.

Appendix Three

Concurrent Planning

Children need permanent homes as quickly as possible for their emotional well-being. Current practice is not effective in making that consistently happen throughout the province. This is particularly true in the planning processes involved in temporary foster care and intensive family renewal, and if unsuccessful, permanent placement with a new family.

Presently, child welfare works with parents to resolve the issues that placed their child in need of protective services. If those efforts are unsuccessful, the child welfare worker will introduce an alternative permanency plan. When this method of sequential planning is used in case management, children often remain in foster care for longer periods of time, many for the greater part of their childhood. In addition, children may experience multiple moves, which impacts their ability to form normal attachments and healthy emotional and physical development.

Inconsistency also exists in the involvement of parents and youth in the development of service plans that outline the expectations and responsibilities involved in alleviating the protection concerns. Parents need avenues to engage in meaningful processes to develop a child-centered plan of care that reflects the best interests of their child. All parties affected by decisions involving permanency for the child must have a clear understanding of their responsibilities and should be held accountable for achieving them.

Concurrent planning involves the practice of developing two plans. The first is the preferred plan and focuses on reunification with the child's family. At the same time, a second plan is developed which is an alternative or contingency long-term permanency plan, which may include adoption. If the goals in the first plan are not met within the designated timeframe, the second plan comes into effect.

Concurrent planning is a way of ensuring that a child's need for permanency and stability are met. The concurrent planning process should respect parental rights and responsibilities and ensure parents are supported in an open and honest manner, while still promoting the best interests of the child in achieving permanency. This process fosters early decision-making for the permanent care of children by reducing the time it takes to achieve a permanent placement for children and youth in their familial home, with extended family, in their community or through adoption.

Processes such as family group conferencing, mediation and alternative dispute resolution processes should result in permanency plans that reflect the child's best interests. Family group conferencing is a process in which a facilitator helps children, youth and families identify family strengths and needs and develop a case plan for the protection of their child.

Concurrent rather than sequential planning allows the child to move more quickly from a temporary placement to a permanent placement. Both plans of care would have to be child-centered, attainable and contain goals, services, measurable outcomes and timeframes.

As well, steps should be taken to reduce the number of moves for children. This could involve approving foster homes as adoptive homes across the province, allowing children to be placed with 'foster to adopt' homes. Children would then be adopted if parental rights were terminated.



Appendix Four

Rationale for Reducing the Time Required to Achieve Permanency

Under our current system, children wait in limbo for up to two years, and in exceptional considerations up to three years, to determine if the parent is able and willing to address their issues and gain the skills necessary for their child to be returned safely to their care. This is mainly due to the current legislative timelines and processes, which have allowed children to remain in the system for extended periods of time with minimal accountability for permanency.

Attachment and developmental issues need to be a primary consideration in permanency planning for children. Harm from lengthy placements is greater in the earlier years of a child's life as critical brain development occurs within the first several years. Therefore, shortened time frames should be enforced for children under the age of six.

Increased consideration should be provided for older youth to reunify with parents or establish an alternate permanency situation to support their continued contact with parents, as potential harm from termination is greater for older children.

Regardless of age, research indicates that it is vital for children to form a meaningful, long-term relationship with at least one person. In the absence of this individual and a permanent home, children are likely to suffer serious developmental harm, thus directly impacting their ability to become healthy functioning adults.

The child protection system needs to re-emphasize the need for meaningful efforts with the parents and children to reunify the family. However, in situations where parents are totally unresponsive to treatment efforts or fail to maintain contact with their child - and child welfare has been diligent in its efforts to work with the parents - termination of parental rights is necessary to support the healthy development and ongoing protection of the child.

Appendix Five

Adoption

The family is the most appropriate place for a child to receive the care they need to grow up to be healthy adults. Children are sometimes separated from their parents for various reasons, or their parents are unable to care for them.

Children in permanent government care may not have the option of returning to their parents. These children have often been in foster care for long periods of time. If parents are no longer able to provide care to their child, Children's Services may be involved in finding a new family to adopt them.

Many children in permanent care have complex needs and it is sometimes difficult to find adoptive homes for them. Children waiting for adoption through child welfare may have entered the system because they have suffered abuse, neglect or abandonment by their parents. This maltreatment has often resulted in emotional or behavior difficulties for these children. In some cases, developmental delays have occurred, or the children are placed in government care with developmental or physical disabilities and continue to require special care. As well, many children for whom adoptive placements have not been found are older, school age children or are siblings that need to be adopted together. The challenges for adoptive families trying to address the emotional, cultural and other complex needs of these children can be great.

Adoption is one way the government finds permanent families that can care for children. Legislation in the area of adoption addresses international adoption, direct adoption, and adoption records. It is imperative to reaffirm that adoption is intended to provide a lifelong commitment of permanence and stability for children.

Albertans should be made more aware of the large number of children currently in the care of the director who could be adopted.

Appendix Six

Methodology

In 2001, a Child Welfare Act Review Committee was struck to assist in the development of recommendations for the legislation. The role of the Review Committee was to develop the terms of reference, strategic directions, provide an analysis of the directions, including the broad socio-political and technical feasibility, and identify barriers to implementation.

The Committee included:

- Harvey Cenaiko, MLA, Chair of Committee
- Sandra Klashinsky, Executive Manager, *Child Welfare Act Review*, Alberta Children's Services
- Susan Rankin, Director, Alberta Children's Services
- Deborah McElrath, Legal Policy Analyst, Alberta Children's Services
- Nela Afonso, Legislative Planner, Alberta Children's Services
- Elden Block, Director of Programs, Sakaw-Askiy Child and Family Services Authority
- Laverna McMaster, Manager, Alberta Children's Services
- Leanne Reeb, Manager, Ma'mowe Capital Region Child and Family Services Authority
- Ruth Copot, Executive Manager, Calgary Rocky View Child and Family Services Authority
- John McDermott, Director, Alberta Children's Services
- Daryl Bertsch, Manager, Alberta Children's Services
- Sharon Harewood, Manager, Alberta Children's Services
- Sherry Thompson, Director, Alberta Children's Services

A number of individuals with specialized knowledge and experience relating to specific areas in the legislation were also consulted with throughout the process.

The review process was structured to be as inclusive as possible and to provide Albertans with the opportunity to share their perspectives on how best to produce a balanced piece of legislation that will serve children and support families for years to come.

A *Child Welfare Act* review discussion guide booklet and website was developed to provide Albertans with an opportunity to provide their input to the review process. The guide was intended to orient participants to the review process and to provide a framework for discussion. The discussion guide included 43 questions and was structured around principles, children in need of protective services, adoptions, and services to children with disabilities. In addition, copies of the existing *Child Welfare Act*, the Ministry of Children's Services Annual Report, and the Consolidation of Comparative Child Welfare Legislation, were posted on the website to help the public prepare submissions.

The review was structured to include a wide range of discussion areas. In developing the recommendations for legislative changes, the following identifies some of the predominant areas that were discussed:

- Early Childhood Development
- Early Intervention and Prevention
- Fetal Alcohol Syndrome
- Family Violence, Addictions
- Protective Services
- Children with Mental Health Problems
- Permanency Planning
- Private Guardianship
- Post-Guardianship Supports
- Parental Accountability
- Transitional Supports for Youth
- First Nations, Aboriginal, Métis and Inuit
- Confidentiality and Release of Information
- Resources for Children with Disabilities
- Adoption
- Advocacy
- Accountability
- Appeal Mechanisms
- Foster Care
- Collaboration

The scope and significance of the legislative review project required Children's Services to work closely with partnering departments and affected stakeholders to ensure that all relevant issues were identified and resolved. The review included the *Child Welfare Act*, but didn't encompass the *Protection of Children involved in Prostitution Act*, *Protection Against Family Violence Act*, *Social Care Facilities Review Committee Act*, *Child and Family Services Authorities Act*, or *Family and Community Support Services Act*.

The process took place in the following timeframes:

June - September 2001

- Phase I of the review began by researching child welfare legislation, policy and best practices across the provinces, nationally, and internationally including the United States, United Kingdom, Europe, Australia and New Zealand. The background review was consolidated into a reference document for the review.
- Stakeholders were identified and a process structured for stakeholder review and submissions.
- A process and criteria for the development of recommendations was established.

October 2001 - April 2002

- During the stakeholder review and submissions phase, over 600 verbal and written submissions, including over 20 Aboriginal submissions, were received from individuals, agencies and groups from across the province. This information formed the basis for the development of the recommended strategic directions outlined in this report.
- Over 140 meetings were held with a wide cross-section of people. This experience provided the review team with a full perspective on the issues of child welfare. Meetings were held with a range of individuals, groups and organizations that had a vested interest in Alberta's children and families. This included youth, front-line workers, First Nations, Aboriginal, Métis and Inuit persons, foster families, agencies, adoptive families and adoption agencies, Child and Family Services Authorities, government representatives and Ministries.

May - October 2002

- Submissions were consolidated and analyzed.
- Second level consultations occurred with key stakeholders.
- Recommendations were drafted and the report to the Minister prepared.



National Library of Canada
Bibliothèque nationale du Canada



3 3286 52735427 4